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Women in the Fire Department

When a building is burning and collapsing, the last person one would expect to see would be a female firefighter coming to their rescue. Society stereotypes nearly every profession with gender, body type, and physical abilities. Of the thousands of firefighters across the United States, only a small two percent make up the amount of women in the department (BLS). While there are certain physical requirements one must meet to join the department, there are no restrictions on gender. However, being a male dominant job, people have seemed to place their own restrictions on the gender type for fire fighters hence the name “firemen” not “firewomen.”

Fire fighter requires much physical strength, quickness, and a daredevil attitude. While many women are not able meet the requirements, for their own safety they wouldn’t consider the fire department as a job. However, this does not mean that all women are not able to do so. Upon applying for this job one must complete a fitness and academic test. If both are passed, several weeks of intense training are required along with the every day workouts that are needed to be completed daily (BLS). Along with the mental toughness and sharpness, firefighters require hours of studying to pass tests to receive their certification in different aspects of the department. Because of the amount of work it takes to make it in this job, it turns heads when people see a women fire fighter. As a minority, the female fire fighter must work twice as hard just to keep up with their male coworkers. Because they face so many life-threatening and graphic situations and on a daily basis, society does not see a woman having the mental toughness it takes as well. It is a common stereotype that women are overly emotional and dramatic. In a job like this it is not seen as okay to be emotional about those situations because it shows weakness. The minute a female decides to pull the “female card,” saying that it is because she is a girl it’s okay to be weaker is when most male fire fighters lose respect and a sense of equality for them.

Many women are looked down upon because people believe that they are not strong enough to save people and they would be doing a “man’s job.” However, this is hardly the case. Local woman firefighter Kehau Lau of the Kakaako station stated that "Even though I work out just as hard as any of the guys at the station, they still look at me like I am not able to do tasks as well as them." For example, she shared with me how the men at her station are always quick to grab the heavy equipment even though she is perfectly able to carry it on her own. While this may just be out of chivalry, it shows how gender stereotypes are prevalent today. Not all women are the stereotyped skinny blond girls who don’t lift a finger. Many are hardworking and push to do something out of the ordinary.

I am a strong believer that women can do anything they set their minds to even if the odds are against them. Due the stereotype that women are weak and that firefighting is unfeminine, women who are interested in the job end up turning away from it out of fear of being judged. Women fire fighters should not be seen as any less of a woman just because their job requires them to do what society sees as “male work.” I understand that it will take time to change people’s views on woman firefighters because they are such a minority. Women must continue to push forward to gain an equal status as men in the firefighting work force.